DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 586 HE 003 721

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TITLE Senior Attitudes on Current Issues.
INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Buffalo. Univ. Research Office.
PUB DATE Oct 70
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Tests; *Changing Attitudes; Civil Rights; *Higher Education; *Social Attitudes; *Student Attitudes; *Student Opinion

ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1969, questionnaires were sent to a random sample of all 1969 seniors at the State University of New York at Buffalo to gather information of student attitudes concerning civil rights, Vietnam, poverty, selective service, and East-West differences. Of the 106 men and 90 women that responded to the questionnaire, a majority of students reported there had been a change in their thinking on the issue of civil rights since their college experience, especially in the areas of increased awareness, increased knowledge, or greater concern regarding this problem. A majority of students indicated that their attitude regarding the way in Vietnam had changed since they entered college, with 75% stating unequivocally that they were against U.S. involvement in Vietnam and that we should withdraw our troops. The problem of poverty seemed to be more of an enigma to students than the problems of civil rights or Vietnam; there were fewer specific positions taken and fewer solutions proposed than for either of the 2 previous questions. More than twice as many students said that they had changed their thoughts on the issue of selective service, with 74% against the draft as it existed at that time or beginning to question its advisability. A sizeable number of students indicated that their views on the issue of East-West differences had changed during their college years, and most students spoke specifically of Russia and the United States in their responses, rather than in the more vague terms of East and West. (HS)

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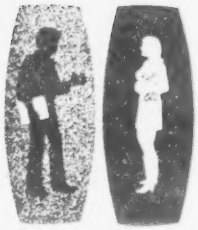

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SENIOR ATTITUDES ON CURRENT ISSUES

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HE003221

October 1970

State University of New York, Buffalo, N.Y. 14214

SENIOR ATTITUDES ON CURRENT ISSUES

ABSTRACT

In the Spring of 1969, questionnaires were sent to a random sample of all those who were 1965 SUNYAB Freshmen and all those who were 1969 SUNYAB graduating Seniors to gather data for the 1969 Senior Survey. Those who returned the questionnaires (106 men, 90 women) represented 30% of the sample and 6% of the specified population.

Following are the more salient results of a classification of free-response attitudes on Civil Rights, Vietnam, Poverty, Selective Service, and East-West Differences from the Survey.

A majority of students (57 men, 49 women) reported there had been a change in their thinking on the issue of civil rights, compared with 31 men and 33 women - the largest number indicating "no change" on any of the five issues - who said there had been no change. A considerable number of students mentioned that one change for them had been increased awareness, increased knowledge, or greater concern regarding this problem. The largest group of students (46 men, 40 women) maintained that they were "for civil rights" with virtually no qualification. Some (6 men, 3 women) frankly admitted that they were unsympathetic to the civil rights movement; that they had become part of the "white backlash" in response to the demands of some minority groups. A number of students (6 men, 4 women) said that they had changed from a belief in non-violence to a belief in militancy or were now "radical" regarding the accomplishment of civil rights objectives. On the other hand, twice that number (15 men, 6 women) commented that they were disturbed by or afraid of the use of force by activists.

A majority of students (66 men, 66 women - the largest number indicating "change" on any of the five issues) indicated that their attitude regarding the War in Vietnam had changed since they entered college; less than a third of that number (19 men, 18 women) said that their attitude had not changed. Perhaps reflecting girls' traditional isolation from military matters, 19 men but 35 women mentioned that they were more aware, more concerned, or more knowledgeable on the issue than they had been before college; 16 men and 19 women admitted that before starting college they were unaware of the problem or had no opinion on it. A total of 139 students (75% of those responding to this question) started unequivocally that they were against U.S. involvement in Vietnam and that we should withdraw our troops. On the other hand, 17 students (9% of those responding) supported United States' presence in Vietnam.

Nearly twice as many students (46 men, 44 women) reported that their thinking on the issue of poverty had gone through changes since starting college as indicated that it had not (28 men, 23 women). Although a sizable number of students (20 men, 14 women) mentioned that they had previously been unaware or unconcerned about the problem, even more, and especially women (22 men, 37 women), said that they had increased

their knowledge or understanding of the causes and dynamics of the problem of poverty since starting college. The problem of poverty seemed to be more of an enigma to students than the problems of civil rights or Vietnam; there were fewer specific positions taken and fewer solutions proposed than for either of the two previous questions. The greatest number of students (54 men, 40 women) suggested simply that they had become quite concerned about the problem and that "something must be done." A larger number (11 men, 14 women) than all those proposing specific solutions expressed dissatisfaction with present programs to aid the poor (notably welfare), which seemed to them to be overrun with problems and, in their opinion, were often more detrimental than beneficial.

More than twice as many students (42 men, 44 women) said they had changed their thoughts on the issue of selective service while in college as said they had not (24 men, 18 women). A total of 131 students (74% of those responding to this question) were against the draft, at least in the form in which it existed at the time of the survey, or were beginning to question its advisability. Conversely, 16 men and 12 women (12% of those responding)commented in favor of the selective service.

A sizable number of students (41 men, 40 women) indicated that their views on the issue of East-West differences had changed during their college years, while less than half that number (24 men, 13 women) said they had experienced no change. Many students spoke specifically of Russia and the United States in their responses, rather than in the more vague terms East and West; it appeared that many students felt the terms were, for all practical purposes, synonymous. Also, most of the students who indicated there had been a change in their attitude expressed feelings more moderate and more tolerant than the "America is always right" view that some students claimed they had been taught in high school.

SENIOR ATTITUDES ON CURRENT ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

In March, 1970, the office of University Research published the 1969 Senior Survey as part of the continuing Biography of a Class[1] project. The Senior Survey was a profile of 1969 SUNYAB Seniors: their perceptions of the college experience, their perceptions of how that experience changed their lives, and their expectations for the future. The data was gathered from questions using primarily multiple-choice items; one page of the questionnaire, however, encouraged the students to express themselves freely in their own words on five areas of concern: Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, Poverty, the Selective Service, and East-West Differences. The students were specifically asked what changes, if any, had occurred in their feelings on these issues during the years they spent at college. Many commented not only on their attitudinal changes but also on the problems themselves. These responses were classified, and this report presents the more interesting findings of an analysis of that classification.

METHODOLOGY

Students who were designated to be subjects for the original Survey were all those who were SUNYAB Freshmen in 1965 (and would "normally" have graduated in 1969) and all those who were in fact graduating from SUNYAB in 1969 (including those who were not 1965 SUNYAB Freshmen). A random sample of these groups was selected, and those who ultimately completed

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[1]Completed publications of the Biography of a Class project, including the 1969 Senior Survey, are available at the University Research office.

and returned the questionnaires (106 men, 90 women) represented 30% of the sample and 6% of the originally specified total population.

In the free response questions, students were asked to "Briefly describe changes in your attitudes that have occurred in your college years" on the five areas of concern. The students responded in a number of ways, stating simply either "change" or "no change," outlining previous and current attitudes and the agents of change, or merely giving their current feelings on the subject, ignoring the question of change.

The responses were coded on an empirical basis, using the responses to determine the categories. Categories were distinct for each topic, although similar responses occurred in different topics. Each response was classified on three bases: first, if there was an indication that a change had or had not occurred; next, if there was an indication that the respondent had increased his knowledge or awareness of the issue; and finally, according to any position the respondent previously or currently held. For each comment of different substance made by a student, one response was tallied in each applicable category. One student could be represented in more than one category, but he could not be in any one category more than once. Categories were renamed and rearranged during classification to assure the most accurate and economical classification. After any changes were made, previously categorized responses were checked to assure the accuracy of their placement. It should be stressed, however, that all placement was ultimately the subjective judgement of the author.

Questions are discussed in the order they appeared in the questionnaire. Unless otherwise noted, numbers of students were split evenly between men and women. Since all information was volunteered, the number of students in each category should be considered as the minimum number holding that particular view.

SENIOR ATTITUDES

Civil Rights

A majority of students (57 men, 49 women) reported there had been a change in their thinking on the civil rights issue during their college years, compared with 31 men and 33 women who said there had been no change. A considerable number of students (28 men, 34 women) mentioned that one change for them had been increased awareness, increased knowledge, or greater concern regarding the problem of civil rights. Some (13 men, 11 women) indicated that before college they were unaware of the problem or had no opinion on it.

Perhaps supporting the contention that girls have a more sheltered upbringing than boys, 14 women but only one man said that they had never had contact with minorities, prejudice, or civil rights activists before entering college. Ten women also reported that their previously sympathetic but untested attitude toward civil rights was now supported by knowledge and facts; their theoretical position now had a basis in experience.

The complete range of sympathies to the civil rights movement lay within both categories of "change" and "no change." The largest group of students (46 men, 40 women) maintained that they were "for civil rights" with virtually no qualification. An additional 6 men and 11 women noted that their previously sympathetic feelings for the civil rights movement had intensified since they left high school. A few students (2 men, 3 women) admitted that although they now fully believe in equality, they had once been bigoted; a few others (1 man, 3 women) professed a growing awareness that their previously-held, middle-class-liberal position was inadequate. A number of students (6 men, 4 women) said that they had changed from a belief in non-violence to a belief in militancy or were now

"radical" regarding the accomplishment of civil rights objectives. On the other hand, twice that number (15 men, 6 women) commented that they were disturbed by or afraid of the use of force by activists.

A number of students (13 men, 9 women) said they were "for civil rights," but with certain reservations: that there should be no "over-equality" or "reverse discrimination," that "some minority groups want too much too fast," or that "equal rights must be earned." Some (6 men, 3 women) frankly admitted that they were unsympathetic to the civil rights movement; that they had become part of the "white backlash" in response to the demands of some minority groups.

Eight men and three women made no comment.

Vietnam

A majority of students (66 men, 66 women) indicated that their attitude regarding the War in Vietnam had changed since they entered college; less than a third of that number (19 men, 18 women) said that their attitude had not changed. Perhaps reflecting girls' traditional isolation from military matters, 19 men but 35 women mentioned that they were more aware more concerned, or more knowledgeable on the issue than they had been before college; 16 men and 19 women admitted that before starting college they were unaware of the problem or had no opinion on it.

A total of 139 students (75% of those responding to this question) stated unequivocally that they were against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Of this group, the largest number (35 men, 30 women) indicated simply that they were against the United States' involvement in Vietnam, that it was either immoral or unwise, and that we should withdraw our troops as quickly as possible. The second largest number of students among those against the War (27 men, 18 women) stated that they had originally felt

that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was necessary, but were now against it. Some students (13 men, 7 women) mentioned that their feelings against the War had intensified while at college; they were more strongly against the War than ever. A few others (3 men, 5 women) maintained that they were against any and all war and that the U.S. should unilaterally withdraw from Vietnam.

Beyond the 139 students positively against the War, 4 men and 6 women suggested that they were beginning to doubt the necessity of U.S. involvement there. Another 3 men agreed that the United States should get out of Vietnam, but stipulated that the withdrawal should be in dignity with an honorable truce.

A number of students (6 men, 13 women) stated that they now doubt our government's credibility as a result of the War, while a few (5 men, 6 women) mentioned that they could no longer believe that America was always right, as they were led to think in high school.

On the other hand, 17 students (9% of those responding) supported United States' presence in Vietnam. Of these 17, some (5 men, 1 woman) simply stressed that the War was necessary to stop communism and terrorism. A few others (2 men, 3 women) added that they didn't like war of any kind, but agreed that sometimes it was necessary, as in Vietnam. A small number (4 men, 2 women) stated that they basically supported U.S. involvement there, but disagreed with our present policies or methods. Beyond the 17 students supporting our presence there were two students who felt that whether the War was right or wrong, we must support our men who are fighting there.

Eight men and 3 women made no comment, and two women asserted that they didn't know what their attitude was.

Poverty

Nearly twice as many students (46 men, 44 women) reported that their thinking on the issue of poverty had gone through changes since starting college as indicated that it had not (28 men, 23 women).

Although a sizable number of students (20 men, 14 women) mentioned that they had previously been unaware or unconcerned about the problem, even more, and especially women (22 men, 37 women), said that they had increased their knowledge or understanding of the causes and dynamics of the problem of poverty since starting college.

The problem of poverty seemed to be more of an enigma to students than the problems of civil rights or Vietnam; there were fewer specific positions taken and fewer solutions proposed than for either of the two previous questions. The greatest number of students (54 men, 40 women) suggested simply that they had become quite concerned about the problem and that "something must be done." Another nine students said that they were more concerned than ever about the problem, although they had been aware of it for quite a while. While small numbers of students did suggest specific solutions - better education (6 men, 5 women), guaranteed annual income (3 men, 1 woman), negative income tax (2 men), population control (2 women) - six students admitted that they didn't know how to combat the problem. A larger number (11 men, 14 women) than all those who proposed specific solutions expressed dissatisfaction with present programs to aid the poor (notably welfare), which seemed to them to be overrun with problems and often more detrimental than beneficial.

Some students (11 men, 8 women) asserted that there was no excuse for poverty in this country. Whether they meant that such an affluent society should adequately support the poor or that anyone in this opportunity-rich society should be able to succeed if he tries was not always clear, but it

appeared that the former meaning was usually implied. In a less vague but still general way, eight students asserted that poverty was a reflection of the structure of society, not of individual inadequacy. On the other hand, three women felt that the problem was individual inadequacy; that the poor "must help themselves."

Indicating, perhaps, a frustration with some current government programs, 15 men and 11 women expressed a lack of sympathy for those poor who were able to work but instead took advantage of poverty programs. "Hard work eliminates poverty," one student said, "No one's giving me anything."

A number of students (12 men, 7 women) said that the problem of poverty should be given a higher national priority, especially over military spending. A few (2 men, 4 women) mentioned that they were actively involved in the community helping the poor, and eight others said they would like to be or had plans to be more involved personally.

Two men and five women said they were unaware of or unconcerned about the problem, and 8 men and 9 women made no comment.

Selective Service

More than twice as many students (42 men, 44 women) said they had changed their thoughts on the issue of selective service while in college as said they had not (24 men, 18 women). A number of students (18 men, 19 women) mentioned that before college they had given no thought to the selective service, but 15 men and 12 women asserted that they were now directly involved with it, while 10 men and 9 women said they were now aware of the problem or had increased knowledge about it.

A total of 131 students (74% of those responsing to this question) were against the draft, at least in the form in which it existed at the time of the survey[2], or were beginning to question its advisability.

[2]The survey was made before the current draft lottery went into effect.

Of this group of 131 students, the largest number (34 men, 25 women) maintained that they were against the draft as it then existed; they did not necessarily disagree with conscription in principle, but felt that it was grossly unfair in its operation and should be modified. A nearly equal number (34 men, 19 women) stressed that they were against conscription in any form - that the draft should not exist. Of the two above groups expressing dissatisfaction with the draft, 10 men and 12 women said that they had previously been in favor of or at least compliant with the draft system. In addition to the two groups specified above, 7 men and 3 women professed that they were more against the selective service system than ever; they had been against it when they entered college and their feelings had intensified while they were here. A few students (4 men, 5 women) reported that they were for the first time questioning the system or had mixed feelings about it; no longer were they convinced of its necessity to exist or operate as it had been.

Conversely, 16 men and 12 women (12% of those responding) commented in favor of the selective service - that it was necessary, that it was the best possible alternative, that it was one's duty for his country, or that it was "the price to pay for freedom."

A preponderance of women (4 men,10 women) maintained that the draft undermined a man's security, putting his future in limbo for eight years while he was eligible for the draft. Some said that men (and their wives) couldn't plan for the future because of it; others claimed that it "ruined lives." Seven women said that girls should also be draftable; that everyone should serve "in some capacity."

A number of students (8 men, 7 women) suggested a change to the lottery method of selection, others (7 men, 5 women) felt that a volunteer army would be the only fair alternative, while 2 men and 3 women said that

either system would be better than the selection methods then in use. On the other hand, nine students said that they would be afraid of a volunteer professional army or stated that they doubted it could work. Reflecting the more immediate concerns of graduating seniors, six students stated emphatically that graduate students should be deferred from military service as well as undergraduates, some rationalizing that many other segments of the population did not "have as much to lose" as those, like themselves, who were just entering graduate school. Another group (3 men, 9 women) felt that the Vietnam War was the root of the problem; with the end of the War would come the end of the draft, or at least the end of draft protest.

Four men noted that they had already served in the armed forces and did not feel threatened or concerned about the draft. A few (1 man, 3 women) said they didn't know how they felt, and 20 students made no comment.

East - West Differences

A sizable number of students (41 men, 40 women) indicated that their views on the issue of East - West differences had changed during their college years, while less than half that number (24 men, 13 women) said they had experienced no change. A few (3 men, 6 women) noted that they had previously been unaware of the issue, while 20 men and 26 women mentioned that they had become more aware of the problem or had a better understanding of the world or of Eastern thought since beginning college. Twelve students admitted that they were still uninformed or apathetic on the issue.

Many students spoke specifically of Russia and the United States in their responses, rather than in the more vague terms East and West; it appeared that many students felt the terms were, for all practical purposes, synonymous. Also, most of the students who indicated that there had been a

change in their attitude expressed feelings more moderate and more tolerant than the "America is always right" view that some students claimed they had been taught in high school. Some (14 men, 7 women) professed that they now felt that both sides (East and West, or Russia and the United States) were quite similar, with both exhibiting good and bad qualities. Ten other students more specifically mentioned that they now realized that the United States (or democracy, or capitalism) was not always good, right, and altruistic; that we were essentially power-seeking, too. On the other side of the coin, 6 men and 4 women now felt that Russia (or communism) was not always evil, wrong, or demonic; it no longer seemed, to them, so much of a threat. Reacting even more strongly, seven students (2 men, 5 women) stated that they had become either isolationist or pro-East.

Taking the position that there are differences between East and West, five women optimistically asserted that people everywhere had the same basic needs, that we (Eastern and Western peoples) might be closer than we believe, and that our differences can be overcome. From a slightly different position, 11 men and 5 women stressed that people were the same everywhere and that there were no real differences between them; the problem was primarily with leaders on both sides who perpetuated the alleged differences, often for their own advantage. Some students (13 men, 3 women) commented simply that they were opposed to the cold war and that both sides should practice peace and understanding. A small number (7 men, 4 women) stated that they were confident that there would be a rational solution to our differences, given sufficient time.

Other students took a more pessimistic view. Eighteen students felt that the large differences between East and West were a very profound and complex problem for which there would be no quick resolution. A smaller number (4 men, 1 woman) agreed that there would be no quick resolution to

our large differences simply because communists were so depraved and intractable. A few students (4 men, 1 woman) admitted that they were frankly afraid of communism and/or a possible war. Another small group (4 men, 3 women) felt that while Russia was less of a threat than before, Red China was much more of one. A few students (2 men, 1 woman) maintained that the differences which existed were differences between independent nations and were not ideological differences at all.

Fifteen men and 28 women made no comment.